



P.O. Box 20891 • Billings, MT 59104

A program of Big Sky Senior Services, Inc. 

August 25, 2016

**Children, Families, Health, and Human Services
Interim Committee**

Dear Chairman Webb and Committee Members:

My name is Cynthia Rierson. I am a retired trust officer who joined the Yellowstone County Guardianship Council in 2001, serving until 2014, retiring for 1 ½ years and rejoining the council in 2016. During my time on the council, I have witnessed firsthand how important the council is. We serve as guardian for Yellowstone County residents who have no family to serve or whose family has been deemed inappropriate to serve and are appointed by the Yellowstone County District Court. We have accepted guardianship for adults abused by their family members, either financially, physically, mentally or all three. We currently have 12 people serving. Per our bylaws, we must have a physician, a social worker, a lawyer, and a financial person on our council. The other members represent a cross section of our community. The one characteristic all share is a desire/passion to help those who cannot help themselves.

We get referrals from many sources, such as Adult Protective Services, the hospitals, and nursing facilities. When we get a referral, two or three members of the council make a visit to the proposed ward to see if the ward is willing to accept a guardian and to get to know the potential ward. This group then makes a recommendation to our entire council as to whether the proposed ward is a good fit for our group. Some proposed wards have too many issues, such as drug abuse or mental problems, for us as a volunteer group to handle. Or the proposed ward could be living on his/her own, not in a facility. These individuals we feel we cannot handle. All other potential wards are considered.

We have had to turn down appropriate wards because we are a small council. It has been difficult to recruit new members since many individuals feel they don't have the knowledge or background to serve as a guardian. It is our hope that with the proposed legislation and working to have guardianship councils statewide, that we will be able to provide the training to increase our council and be able to serve more individuals than we can currently serve. For someone who has a passion to serve the needy, it is very difficult to say no, we cannot serve as guardian.

As our population ages, the need for guardianships is only going to become greater. The proposed legislation is the first step to helping our state become better prepared to handle the needs of our citizens.

Thank you for the time you have spent working on this issue. We look forward to working with you in the weeks and months to come.

Cynthia Rierson
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Yellowstone County Guardianship Committee